DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 406 639 CG 027 801

AUTHOR	Nadler, Daniel P.; Miller, Michael T.
TITLE	Consensus of Chief Student Affairs Officers toward the CAS Orientation Standards.
SPONS AGENCY	American Coll. Personnel Association, Alexandria, VA.
PUB DATE	[97]
NOTE	16p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College Administration; Higher Education; Program Evaluation; *School Orientation; School Surveys; Standards; *Student Personnel Services; *Student Personnel Workers
IDENTIFIERS	*Chief Student Affairs Officers; Orienting Information

ABSTRACT

The role of the chief student affairs officer (CSAO) has become paramount to the stability of colleges and universities. Since the CSAO typically determines the direction and framework for the student affairs program, the purpose of this study was to identify CSAOs' levels of agreement on the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) for student orientation programs. In addition to profiling CSAO perceptions, the study was designed to allow for a comparison of perceptions based on the type of institution which employed the CSAO. A random sample of 150 CSAOs were surveyed; they provided a rating of their level of agreement that each of the CAS standards should be a priority for new student orientation programs. Respondents indicated the importance of orientation activities and strong consensus was revealed on 10 orientation goals. Goals for orientation programs which received the least support dealt primarily with the external business of attending college, such as off-campus housing. The small difference among the orientation goals for different types of institutions could indicate that the CAS program holds the same assumptions regardless of institutional size. (RJM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 406 639

Consensus of Chief Student Affairs Officers toward the CAS Orientation Standards

Dr. Daniel P. Nadler
Assistant Dean of Students
Suite 204, University Center
Tulane University
New Orleans, LA 70118-5698
(504) 865-5141
FAX: (504) 862-8730
e-mail: nadler@mailhost.tcs.tulane.edu

Dr. Michael T. Miller
Assistant Professor
Department of Administration in Higher Education
Box 870302
University of Alabama
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487
(205) 348-1170
FAX: (205) 348-2161
e-mail: mmiller@bamaed.ua.edu

Running Head: CSAO CAS Consensus

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The current investigation was made possible through a grant from the American College Personnel Association Commission II. The authors wish to thank Dr. Robert Brown of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Dr. Arthur Casebeer of Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, Mr. Lou Stark of Central College in Iowa, and Mr. David Hansen of the University of Nevada-Reno for their service on the investigation's advisory committee.

CG027801

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M. Miller

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC).

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Abstract

The role of the chief student affairs officer (CSAO) has become paramount to the stability of higher education institutions. A major function for the student affairs program is the implementation of an effective first-year student orientation program, typically offered as a reflection of the CSAOs beliefs. These orientations are hypothesized to be more effective when they have the support and encouragement of the CSAO. The current investigation was undertaken to examine the support of CSAOs toward each of the independent CAS Standards, and to identify possible differences between the types of institutions represented in the study. While no significant differences were found, an overall high level of support was identified among CSAOs about the priorities for student orientation programs.

The chief student affairs officer (CSAO) has been the subject of much research in recent years (Keim, 1991). The position itself has been examined in terms of its relationship with various campus units, skills and talents necessary for success in the position, job responsibilities, and reporting lines (Vaala, 1989). Individuals holding the CSAO position have also been the subject of much study, as preparation (Hyman, 1988), longevity, personal and professional challenges to holding the position, and decision making processes employed have all been examined. Relatively few attempts, however, have been made to define the influence of personal views on position responsibilities. Subsequently, little is known about the beliefs or perceptions of CSAOs toward the philosophies of certain areas within the domain of student affairs.

Shadowing the growth of research about CSAOs has been an expanding knowledge base about orientation programs. As higher education institutions have been forced to compete for students and federal financial resources, orientation programs have assumed a larger responsibility in retention activities. Orientation programs have also assumed the expectation of creating "a unity, an esprit de corps, a sense of community" (Twale, 1989, p. 161), and has been seen as a mechanism to aid in overcoming the "awkward" transition for students from one culture and setting to another. Perhaps no one has a greater influence on these orientation programs, through both formal decision

making and informal influence, than the chief student affairs officer.

The CSAO typically determines the direction and framework for the student affairs program and the type of orientation programs to be offered. As other departments attempt to influence or participate in orientation, it is the task of the chief student affairs officer to determine the validity and relevance of outside pressures while keeping the student as the focus of the program. As a result of this position of power, the purpose for conducting this study was to identify CSAOs' levels of agreement on the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) for Student Orientation Programs (1988). In addition to profiling CSAO perceptions, the study was designed to allow for a comparison of perceptions based on the type of institution which employed the CSAO.

Background of the Study

Despite the broad realm of student affairs, new student programs have always been an area of significant attention. New student programs have incorporated a number of activities all designed to help the student make a positive transition to the unique and new culture of higher education. Regardless of the myriad of programs, however, one of the first contacts for students with their future alma mater is the new student orientation program. So important is the new student orientation program that the orientation process has received a tremendous

increase in scholarly attention, has been the subject of a number of national and internal seminars and workshops, and has been revised and replicated to facilitate new faculty orientation programs (Miller & Nadler, 1994). Additionally, there is little doubt among practitioners that the new student orientation program is vital to the success of the overall student affairs program.

As higher education institutions differ dramatically, there is a growing need to examine, compare, and understand the various beliefs and practices of orientation. To this end, several theoretical frameworks for orientation models have been suggested, including the cooperative involvement of the entire campus community and the equal integration of social and academic activities (Kramer & Washburn, 1983; Mullendone, 1992; Mullendore & Biller, 1993; Twale, 1989).

The variety of programming options available to student affairs professionals is undoubtedly vast, and the result is a decision by administrators to pursue a clearly identified set of goals and objectives. Gardner and Hanson (1993) outlined this importance by suggesting a high level of responsibility i conveing "...the institutional message to new students of what is expected, as well as required of the student in terms of roles, responsibilities, and outcomes" (p. 192). In selecting an orientation strategy, then, the CSAO plays perhaps the most important role of the entire staff. The CSAO, as other academic officers, provides leadership to the office through both formal

office related power which is typically outlined in a job description, and through informal power which can be exerted through informal and formal interactions (Seagren, Creswell, & Wheeler, 1993).

Methods

Prior to the formal development of a survey instrument, a six person national advisory committee was developed to assess and monitor all aspects of the investigation. To collect relevant data for analysis, survey research methods were employed. The survey instrument was developed based on the CAS Standards and Guidelines for Student Orientation Programs (1988), and demographic information was collected to allow for stratification of data.

The first section of the questionnaire included categorical demographic questions. The second section asked respondents to rate, on a Likert-type scale, their level of disagreement or agreement that each of the CAS standards should be a priority for new student orientation programs. A total of 18 statements (one statement for each standard) was included on the survey.

The sample included 150 chief student affairs officers who were members of the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and/or the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). The sample was randomly selected, intending to accurately portray ACPA or NASPA membership characteristics. The survey was pilot tested for internal

reliability, yielding a Cronbach-alpha of .83. The data were collected in the spring and summer of 1994.

Findings

Making use of two follow-up mailings to increase the response rate, a total of 105 (70 percent) usable surveys were returned for use in data analysis. Of the respondents, 61 percent had held the CSAO position for less than ten years, and nearly all, 90 percent, claimed regular participation in their institution's new student orientation program. The mix of mandatory (58 percent) and non-mandatory (42 percent) participation in orientation was the same as the offering of an introduction or orientation class on campus and student life (58 percent offered the course and 42 percent did not offer the course).

The types of institutions represented by respondents were classified by their Carnegie Classification. The largest number of institutions represented were Comprehensive Universities and Colleges I or II (39 percent), followed by Liberal Arts Colleges I or II (23 percent), Two Year Colleges and Institutions (15 percent), Research Universities I or II (13 percent), and Doctorate Granting Universities I or II (10 percent).

Respondents provided a rating of their level of agreement that each of the CAS Standards should be a priority for new student orientation programs using a 1-to-5 Likert-type scale, with five indicating "strongly agree." Using this scale, the

goal for an orientation program to "create an atmosphere that minimizes anxiety, promotes positive attitudes and stimulates an excitement for learning" was rated as strongly agree by 75 percent of the respondents and achieved a mean rating of 4.709.

A total of 15 of the statements achieved a group mean rating of 4.0 or greater, and were rated as strongly agree or agree by at least 80 percent of the respondents. Table 1 shows the mean ratings for each statement, the percentages of strongly disagree and disagree, neutral, agree to strongly agree, and the standard deviation for the ratings of each statement.

Stratifying the data by each of the five institution types, the mean scores for each CAS goal were computed and compared. Due to the number of comparisons, the Kruskal-Wallis one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was utilized, and revealed no significant differences at the .05 level. Similarly, length of tenure of the CSAO was used to stratify and examine collected data. Again using the Kruskal-Wallis one-way ANOVA, no significant differences were found.

Discussion

The current investigation was conducted to examine the goals of new student orientation programs as perceived by the CSAO. Literature and professional practice have both confirmed the importance of this position to the leadership of student affairs and development, and this examination sought to identify if this leadership was reflected differently in new student orientation

program goals by length of tenure of the CSAO and by the type of institution offering the orientation program.

With a 70 percent response rate to the survey, a strong degree of interest in the topic was realized. Additionally, the relatively high mean rating of 15 of the 18 CAS Standards for Orientation demonstrated the overall perceived importance of orientation activities. Moreover, exceptionally strong levels of consensus were achieved on ten orientation goals, as evidenced by 90 percent or more of the responding CSAOs agreeing that they should be a priority for the orientation program.

Interestingly, the goals for orientation programs which received the least support dealt primarily with the external "business" of attending college. Statements relating to the economic impact and costs of education, finding housing away from campus, and self-assessment mechanisms all seemed to fall outside of the general realm or purpose of the priorities for orientation programs. This may in part be due to the increased specialization in colleges and universities, and in part due to the idea that an orientation program functions more directly along the lines of a transitional program aimed at the climate and culture of living and studying.

The lack of difference between the orientation goals for different types of institutions revealed that perhaps the program holds the same assumptions regardless of institutional type. This would appear to be consistent with Twale's (1989) contention that orientation programs are driven by the idea of creating

community, regardless of programmatic discipline or research interests of faculty. Similarly, the length of time a CSAO has held the position did not impact or result in a significant difference of perceived orientation program goals. This may also suggest that the orientation program holds a life of its own, and is truly driven by student needs. While the CSAO certainly has the ability to influence the type of orientation program, the commonality in responding to the CAS Standards does provide hope that students continue to be the focus of college and university student affairs operations.

The data also indicates a general emphasis on the acculturation of students to their new institution and what is expected of them. A result of this dual purpose is a strong reliance on orientation programs to aid in the retention of students. Retention based on orientation is in turn suggestive of continuous programming, and may be a determining factor in offering an introduction or orientation to campus/student life course.

Perhaps the most important result of this investigation is the need to continue studying the orientation program and the influence which the CSAO has on this programmatic area. Clearly, there are a number of "high" expectations for the orientation process. With growing pressures to address critical campus and community concerns (i.e., campus saftey, sexuality, alcohol and drug awareness, etc.) the orientation program must begin a prioritization of goals, leading to the development of a viable

orientation curriculum. Through additional study and a combination of professional and academic dialogues, the student affairs community can begin to better understand the different dimensions of an effective orientation experience.

References

Council for the Advancement of Standards for Student Services/Development Programs. (1988). CAS standards for student services/development programs: Student orientation programs self-assessment guide. Washington: Author.

Gardner, J. N., & Hanson, D. A. (1993). Perspectives on the future of orientation. In M. L. Upcraft (Ed.). Designing Successful Transitions: A Guide for Orienting Students to College, pp. 183-194. Columbia, SC: Freshman Year Experience.

Hyman, R. E. (1988). Graduate preparation for professional practice: A difference of perceptions. NASPA Journal, 26(2), 143-150.

Keim, M. C. (1991). Student personnel preparation programs: A longitudinal study. NASPA Journal, 28(3), 231-242.

Kramer, G., & Washburn, R. (1983). The perceived orientation needs of new students. Journal of College Student Personnel, 24(4), 311-319.

Miller, M. T., & Nadler, D. P. (1994). Orientation program considerations for new community college faculty. Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 18(5), 441-448.

Mullendone, R. H. (1992). Student based programming in orientation. In D. P. Nadler (Ed.). Orientation Director's Manual. Statesboro, GA: National Orientation Directors Association.

Mullendone, R. H., & Biller, G. M. (1993). Orientation standards, evaluation, and assessment. In M. L. Upcraft (Ed.). Designing Successful Transitions: A Guide for Orienting Students to College, pp. 169-182. Columbia, SC: Freshman Year Experience.

Seagren, A., Creswell, J., & Wheeler, D. (1993). The department chair: New roles, responsibilities and challenges. Washington: ASHE/ERIC.

Twale, D. J. (1989). Social and academic development in freshman orientation: A time frame. NASPA Journal, 27, 160-167.

Vaala, L. D. (1989). Practical theories for student affairs administration. NASPA Journal, 27(2), 108-115.

Table 1
Reported Levels of Agreement for Orientation Goals

Goal	SD or D	N	SA or A	Mean	St.D.
Create an atmosphere that minimizes anxiety, promotes positive attitudes & stimulates an excitement for learning	1.9%	1.9%	94.2%	4.709	.604
Help students understand the institution's expectations of them	1.9	1.9	96.2	4.638	.622
Improve the retention rate of new students	2.9	3.8	93.3	4.571	.745
Assist students in determining their purpose in attending the inst. & developing positive relationships with faculty, staff, peers, & others	1.9	4.8	93.4	4.581	.676
Provide an atmosphere & sufficient info to enable students to make reasoned decisions	3.8	2.9	93.3	4.533	.735
Provide info concern. academic policies, procedures, requir., & programs	1.0	5.7	93.4	4.533	.651
Provide info & expos. to available inst. resources	1.9	1.9	95.2	4.529	.638
Promote an awareness of non-class opportun.	2.0	6.7	91.4	4.448	.747
Explain the process for class scheduling & provide trained support assistance in accomplish. these tasks	3.8	7.6	88.5	4.381	.789

Table 1, continued
Reported Levels of Agreement for Orientation Goals

Goal	SD or D	N	SA or A	Mean	St.D.
Provide appropr info on personal safety & security	2.0	6.7	90.5	4.337	.732
Assist students in understanding the mission of the inst.	2.9	10.5	85.8	4.269	.766
Provide opportun. for new students to discuss expectations & percept. of campus with contin. students	3.8	12.4	82.9	4.212	.809
Develop familiarity with physical surround.	1.0	6.7	91.4	4.288	.634
Assist students in understanding the purpose of higher education	5.8	10.5	83.8	4.133	.856
Provide referrals to qualified counselors & advisors	1.9	16.2	81.9	4.114	.738
Identify costs in attending the inst., both in dollars and personal commitment	11.5	21.9	66.7	3.800	.975
Provide info about opportunities for self-assessment	2.9	27.6	69.5	3.876	.760
Help students ident. & evaluate housing and commuting options	12.4	33.3	51.4	3.559	.939